

Frequently Asked Questions

Great Kills Park Site

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Gateway National Recreation Area
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Q: What steps are you taking to protect the safety of the visitors?

A: The National Park Service's (NPS) first priority is ensuring the safety of our visitors and employees. NPS has closed off the areas of Great Kills Park where we believe radioactive contamination may be located. The NPS has fenced off the closed areas of the park and posted warning signs along the fence. Maps of the closed areas are available at the Great Kills Park Ranger Station and online at <http://www.nps.gov/gate/parkmgmt/greatkillscleanup.htm>

All closed areas are undergoing further investigation to determine the nature and extent of the contamination. The NPS has surveyed other areas of the park used by visitors and did not detect above normal radiation readings.

Q: How will the NPS keep the public aware of the most up-to-date information about the status of the park?

A: The NPS will continue to update our website (www.nps.gov/gate) and use Facebook (www.facebook.com/GatewayNPS) and Twitter (@GatewayNPS) to keep the public informed. The NPS also will send out update emails periodically to those who have elected to receive email updates. If you would like to add your email address sign up at <http://www.nps.gov/gate/parkmgmt/greatkillscommunityinvolvement.htm>

A Community Involvement Plan (CIP) for the project also can be found on the park's website: (<http://www.nps.gov/gate/parkmgmt/greatkillscommunityinvolvement.htm>). The NPS will continue to update the CIP to reflect the most recent information. The NPS will also continue to host public meetings and/or attend local Community Board meetings as the NPS begin different phases of the project and new information becomes available.

Q: How did the contamination get to Great Kills Park?

A: Prior to the enactment of environmental laws, solid waste often was used as fill material to create new land. In the 1940's Great Kills Park was created in this manner. Based on investigations conducted by NPS to date, NPS believes that some of the fill material used to create land for a portion of the park contained radium. The materials found include debris and other friable material and certain discarded medical devices which were relatively common at the time.

Q: Does the NPS plan to fully address the contamination at Great Kills Park?

A: Yes, NPS is taking all the necessary actions to address risks posed by the contamination at Great Kills Park. The NPS is working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which has a highly experienced and well-qualified team conducting the investigations. First NPS will identify all the radiological contaminants present at the site and the extent of those contaminants. The investigation will then determine whether or not those contaminants pose a risk to human health and the environment. Finally, NPS will evaluate alternatives to determine how best to address those risks in order to make the park safe for all potential future uses.

Q: How will the NPS determine what are safe or unsafe levels of radiation?

A: The NPS is proceeding under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) and the National Oil and Hazardous Substance Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP).

CERCLA and the NCP outline the process that NPS must follow in order to address contaminants at the site. This process establishes rigorous requirements by which the site is investigated, identifies clean-up standards, and requires the evaluation of alternatives in order to ensure the remedy selected will protect human health and the environment and comply with all Applicable or Relevant and Appropriate Requirements (ARARs).

At this site, the criteria for radiation safety that will be reviewed in the analysis of remedy alternatives will include : Standards for Protection against Radiation (10 CFR Part 20), New York State Public Health Law, Section 225, Part 16.7(a), and the New York City Health Code pertaining to radioactive health.

Q: Is the contamination more widespread than previously thought?

A: The contamination is more widespread than was initially identified in 2005. The size of the project has expanded from just a few square meters to over 265 acres of the park now requiring comprehensive investigation for the presence of elevated radioactivity. To date, NPS has identified more than 200 discrete locations of elevated activity spread over the 265 acre waste filled area of the park that requires additional investigation to assess whether they pose a risk to human health and the environment. Although the actions that NPS has already taken will protect public health and the environment for the short term, NPS has determined it is appropriate to undertake a more comprehensive investigation to characterize the extent of the remaining contamination.

Q: *Is the radiation airborne?*

A: No. The radiation is not airborne. Air monitoring in the park has not identified any elevated levels of radioactivity. Air monitoring was performed during excavations of radioactive material and no elevated levels of radioactivity were observed.

Q: *How dangerous is the contaminant?*

A: Radium-226 has been identified as the primary radioactive contaminant at the site. Radium-226 gives off gamma rays which is how we are able to find the contaminants at the site. However, within a few feet of the source of contamination, the gamma radiation levels found at the site drop off to normal background. Therefore, exposure to gamma radiation is not considered to be a significant health risk. The greatest potential risk to human health comes from being in direct contact with the source of the contamination for an extended period of time. The National Park Service has installed fencing to restrict access to the contamination to prevent such contact and signage to inform visitors of the closed areas. As stated above, air monitoring in the park has not identified any elevated levels of radioactivity in the air. For more information on radium go to, <http://www.epa.gov/radiation/radionuclides/radium.html>

Q: *Has residential New York City drinking water been impacted by the contamination at Great Kills Park?*

A: Based on information received from New York City, your water supply is not impacted by this contamination and is entirely safe to use and drink. New York City does not obtain drinking water from Staten Island, instead, the City's water is delivered from a watershed that extends more than 125 miles from the city, and is of extremely high quality. The City's water quality monitoring program – which is far more extensive than that required by law – demonstrates that the quality of New York City's drinking water remains high and meets all health-related State and federal drinking water standards. For more information on the results of those tests go to http://www.nyc.gov/html/dep/html/drinking_water/wsstate.shtml.

Q: *Has ground water been tested for radioactivity in the immediate areas?*

A: Ground water is not a source of drinking water in New York City. Ground water has not been tested for radioactivity. During the next phase of the project the NPS will collect ground water samples to determine if ground water has been impacted by radioactive or other contaminants in the waste filled area.